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# Argonaut and Juggernaut



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# Argonaut and Juggernaut

BY

OSBERT SITWELL

LONDON

Chatto & Windus

1919

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1919

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
ROBERT ROSS

P

139791

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## “HOW SHALL WE RISE TO GREET THE DAWN?”

How shall we rise to greet the dawn ?  
Not timidly,  
With a hand above our eyes,  
But greet the strong light  
Joyfully ;  
Nor will we mistake the dawn  
For the mid-day.

We must create and fashion a new God—  
A God of power, of beauty, and of strength—  
Created painfully, cruelly,  
Labouring from the revulsion of men’s minds.

It is not that the money-changers  
Ply their trade  
Within the sacred places ;  
But that the old God  
Has made the Stock Exchange his Temple.  
We must drive him from it.  
Why should we tinker with clay feet ?  
We will fashion  
A perfect unity  
Of precious metals.

Let us tear the paper moon  
From its empty dome.  
Let us see the world with young eyes.  
Let us harness the waves to make power,  
And in so doing,  
Seek not to spoil their rolling freedom,  
But to endow  
The soiled and straining cities  
With the same splendour of strength.

We will not be afraid,  
Tho' the golden geese cackle in the Capitol,  
In fear  
That their eggs may be placed  
In an incubator.  
Continually they cackle thus—  
These venerable birds—  
Crying, “Those whom the Gods love  
Die young,”  
Or something of that sort.  
But we will see that they live  
And prosper.

Let us prune the tree of language  
Of its dead fruit.  
Let us melt up the clichés  
Into molten metal ;  
Fashion weapons that will scald and flay ;  
Let us curb this eternal humour  
And become witty.

Let us dig up the dragon's teeth  
From this fertile soil ;  
Swiftly,  
Before they fructify ;  
Let us give them as medicine  
To the writhing monster itself.

We must create and fashion a new God—  
A God of power, of beauty, and of strength ;  
Created painfully, cruelly,  
Labouring from the revulsion of men's minds.  
Cast down the idols of a thousand years,  
Crush them to dust  
Beneath the dancing rhythm of our feet.  
Oh ! let us dance upon the weak and cruel :  
We must create and fashion a new God.

*November, 1918.*



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BOOK I  
THE PHÆNIX-FEASTERS



*To* EDITH

## THE PHœNIX-FEASTERS

### PART I

#### PRELUDE

WE have wandered through the dim valleys of sleep  
—That lie so still and far—  
Have bathed in the lakes of silence,  
Where each star  
Shines brighter than its own reflection in the heavens ;  
Where, diving deep,  
My soul has sought to catch and keep  
The silver feathers of the moon  
That float like down upon the waters,  
In whose pale rest  
We find  
Forgetfulness of death  
That comes so soon  
—Waters that lull the mind  
With some sweet breath  
Of wind, of flowers,  
With summer showers of rain,  
Or quicken it with recreative pain.

## PRELUDE

We have fled further from this leaden cage,  
Seeking those rainbow forests,  
Where the light  
Thrills through you, shaking, fainting, with delight ;  
Where sway tall luminous trees  
Wind-swept in one vast flashing harmony,  
That like a wave  
Splashes its seething sound  
And then envelops you.

We have strayed to other places,  
Courts of fear,  
That stretch like echoes through the endless dusk  
Drenched with dead memories ;  
Like musk  
They cling about you  
In a heavy cloud.  
Each shadow-sound we hear  
Clutches the heart.  
With fevered hands we tear  
The terror-pulsing walls  
—Fight our way out  
—Out  
Into other Courts  
As vague and full of fear.  
And we have found the proud and distant palaces of night.

## THE SILENCE OF GOD

ONE night upon the southern sea  
In helpless calm we lay,  
Waiting for day,  
    Waiting for day.

As goldripe fruit fall from a tree  
A comet fell ; no other sight,  
But in the ocean tracks of light  
Trembled—then passed away,  
    Away.

No sound broke on our waiting ears,  
Though instinct whispered wayward fears  
Of things we cannot tell—  
    Of things the sea could tell.

No wisp of wind, no watery sound  
Reached us ; as if high on the ground  
We stayed. A sense of fever fell  
Upon each mind,  
    Each soul and mind.

Until our eyes, that ever sought  
The cloying empty darkness, find

Another shape—or is it wrought  
Of terror?—on the deep  
The endless deep.

All dark it lay. No light shone out;  
And though we cried across, no shout  
Came back to us. As if in sleep  
The black bulk lay so still,  
So still.

No sign came back; no answering cry  
Cleft the immense monotony  
That swathed us like a funeral pall,  
In folds of menace; almost shrill  
The silence seemed,  
And we so small.

Swiftly a boat was lowered down;  
The rowlocks creaked; our track shone white  
Behind us like God's frown,  
God's frown.

We clambered up that great ship's height;  
There was no light; there was no sound;  
Nor was there any being found  
Upon that ship,  
That ship.

We groped our way along. God knows  
How long the rats had been alone  
With dust and rust! Yet flight was shown

To have been instant, in the grip  
Of some force stronger than its foes  
—Its human foes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then sudden from the dark there thrilled  
The distant dying of a song  
That hung like haze upon the sea, and filled  
Each soul with joy and terror strong,  
With joy and terror strong.

Upon the sombre air were spent  
These notes, as from a hidden place  
Where all time and all love lay pent  
In lingering embrace—  
In lingering embrace.

Deep in our hearts we felt the call ;  
We knew that if our fate should send  
That song again, we must leave all  
And follow to the end,  
The end.

## ADVENTURE

Down through the torrid seas we swept,  
Sails curved like bows about to shoot.  
As an arrow speeds through the air  
Our ship parted the clinging waters.

Then, out of the ocean  
Blossomed a distant land.

\* \* \* \* \*

The air quivered,  
Dancing above it  
In a frenzy of passion.  
Waves of heat trembled towards us  
Across the cool lassitude of the ocean.  
They rolled new odours at us,  
Sounding the chords of hidden senses,  
Till we were alert  
With minds as sensitive and taut  
As resined strings.  
The sea itself  
Crouched down behind us,  
Urging us on,  
Driving us on,  
To unknown  
Perilous adventures.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ships and sea were forgotten.  
We trampled  
And stumbled  
On, on,  
Through the burning sand  
To the hot shroud of the squat threatening forest,  
Where, as you walked,  
You tore apart  
A solid sheet of air.

Brown satyrs grimaced at us,  
Swinging with long hairy arms  
From crooked branch to crooked branch.  
The sun  
Was at its height.  
Rays pierced the hot shade ;  
White lines of light  
Shot through the shadows  
To where a point of green  
Shuddered with dangerous movement,  
Throbbed and hummed with the whirr of insects.  
Birds more bright than any streamers from the sun  
Cleft the air  
Like hammers ;  
Scintillating wings  
Tossed patches of colour  
Into the dark shimmering air.  
Shrill calls  
Whistled like knives  
Hurled through the empty heat.

Frantic chattering rose up.  
Through the honeycombed darkness  
Slim animals  
—Their hides splashed with false sunlight—  
Quivered away  
Into the hollow distance.  
Or clattered past us,  
Cloven hooves  
Kicking at the hard, bent trunks  
Of gnarléd trees.  
Large hairy fruits of wood  
Were cast at us,  
Snarlingly,  
From the darkness.  
Faces  
—Faces peered down  
From the interwoven boughs.

Hastily we stumbled on ;  
Hurriedly we stumbled back,  
Bewildered.  
Small tracks  
Tripped through the blackness  
Hither and thither ;  
Twigs crawled from under our feet,  
Hissing away  
In venom  
—And we were bewildered.

Then suddenly  
We felt,

Rumbling in curling patterns through the ground,  
The beating of drums.  
As winds bellow into caves,  
As waves swirl and curl into hollows,  
We heard the blowing of wooden trumpets  
And of pipes.

Soon,  
Under the western canopy of the sun,  
Where the fevered hills lay huddled together,  
We saw great gourd-shaped palaces  
Loom up like mountains.  
Figures played on trumpets,  
Twisted like snakes,  
Or on the curved, carved horns of unknown beasts.  
In the sound was mirrored  
The panic seizures of the night,  
—The fear of things that walk in darkness.  
The drums were painted  
In hot colours  
That, even through the dusk,  
Glowed torture and writhing torment.  
Like a shower of molten lead  
The din fell down upon us  
From the Palaces.

Bare yellow women  
Hurried  
To greet us;  
Their heels swayed inward  
As they walked.

## ADVENTURE

They offered fruits  
—Fruits that were strange to us ;  
Mellow they were, and with a scent  
Of sun, of summer,  
And of woodland nights.  
We ate  
—And dreams closed round.

\* \* \* \* \*

## DUSK

NIGHT like a hawk  
Swooped down  
On to the phœnix bird,  
—Tore out its flaming feathers.  
Solitary plumes  
Flared down into the darkness,  
Floating above the distant sea.  
Stillness and heat clung together ;  
And the hawk  
Spread out her wings.

Gigantic pinions  
Flutter the air above,  
Fanning our faces  
And  
We sing . . . .

## SAILOR-SONG

ON swinging seas our ship has flown  
—In sun and shadow lands alit.  
We saw the sack of Carthage Town  
(And Dido building it).

Cassandra, direful prophetess,  
We heard foretell the fate of Troy,  
And through its streets helped wheel and press  
That wooden, painted toy.

We've seen events aboard this hulk  
Of grave import and mystery  
—The serpent's writhing horrid bulk  
Go seething through the sea.

Then once we left Atlantis Town.  
Behind us like a lily flower  
It blossomed; but then down, far down,  
Sank every vane and tower.

Now you can hear the clanging beat  
Of bells beneath the furious foam.  
In coral palaces the great  
Sea monsters make their home.

Their corridors with pearl are pav'd ;  
Float down them in an endless flight  
Fierce finny beasts. The walls are laved  
In iridescent light.

We brought gifts—myrrh and frankincense—  
From Khubla to the Great Moghul ;  
Espied the Juggernaut immense  
Pound over flesh and skull ;

Saw desert-men atone for ills  
With frenzied hands, with wounds that gape,  
—The hermits hidden in the hills  
—The Herod in his Tyrian Cape.

From out our ship, held fast by gale,  
We watched Andromeda's release ;  
Beheld the galleon in full sail  
That flew the Golden Fleece.

Icarus, proud of his new power,  
We saw stretch out his wings to fly.  
We heard in that tremendous hour  
The cry from Calvary.

Thus many things we understand  
That puzzle landsmen : we can tell  
Of perils in each time and land ;  
But outside Heaven or Hell

No fruit so strange we tasted save  
But one ; none cast so strange a spell  
Except the fruit the first Eve gave  
To the first man who fell.

## THE DANCE

THE song ends.  
The rocking earth  
Plunges madly  
—Lunges like a man  
About to fight.  
Trees roll beckoning branches at us,  
Branches that swing and sway.  
From the forest  
The animals  
Howl  
Like laughter.  
With their burning scimiters  
Flames slice the night.

Monotony,  
A life preserved in ocean salt,  
Scales off our limbs.  
Within our veins  
The liquor of this fruit-of-fire  
Mounts in splendour inexhaustible.  
The world itself  
Dances  
To make us dance  
In cosmic frenzy.

## WHY SHOULD A SAILOR RIDE THE SEA ?

WHY should a sailor ride the sea,  
When he can drink and dance and sing,  
Or watch the stars out-blossoming  
Upon the tree of night ?

Why should he face the tear-salt waves,  
When he can sing, or feast on fruit,  
Dance to the silver-sobbing lute,  
And all men seem his slaves ?

No more to ship or sea we'll go,  
To watch the land sink out of sight  
Suffused by purple fumes of night,  
Each heart weighed down with woe.

But under rustling fretted lace  
Of leaves, we'll dance and stamp our feet  
In frenzy, to the furious beat,  
—The rhythm of all space.

Or watch each dappled fawn and elf  
Spring from the green lairs where they hide ;  
Now every soul is multiplied  
And communes with itself.

## WHY SHOULD A SAILOR

The softly sailing moon is now  
A pendulum, hung in a vast  
Blue bubble—so to mark our fast  
Lithe movements to and fro.

Down from the sky the willing stars  
Fall round each brow a crown to form ;  
Till feet and limbs, a rushing storm,  
Dance whirling on in ecstasy.

The earth dances ;  
The earth dances ;  
Trees charge at us  
Like horsemen ;  
Forests swoop  
Down the hill,  
Charging at us,  
But we are brave,  
Full of a fiery courage,  
And go onward  
Onward,  
Through the galloping trees.  
We shout  
Glowing phrases  
—Snatches of ineffable wit.

The frenzy in our feet  
Must surely set the world afire.

Yet still the stars  
Rain down their golden tremors of delight,  
And the moon  
Sweeps like a bird  
Through the arch of space.

We, too,  
Float downward  
Gently  
To soft shipwreck.

We, too,  
Are of the kindred of the Pleiades ;  
Reel on our golden path  
Down,  
Down,  
Through the curvéd emptiness of the heavens.

## PART II

## CORNUCOPIA

Now music fills the night with moving shades ;  
Its velvet darkness, veined like a grape,  
Obscures and falls round many a subtle shape  
—Figures that steal through cool tall colonnades,  
Vast minotaurian corridors of sleep ;  
Rhythmic they pass us, splashed by red cascades  
Of wine, fierce-flashing fountains whose proud waves  
Shimmer awhile ; plunge foaming over steep  
Age-polished rocks, into the dim cold caves  
Of starlit dusk below—then merge with night,  
Softly as children sinking into sleep.

But now more figures sway into our sight ;  
Strong and bare-shouldered, pressed and laden down,  
Stagger across the terraces. They bear  
Great Cornucopia of summer fruit  
And heavy roses scented with the noon  
—Piled up with fruit and blossoms, all full blown,  
Crimson, or golden as the harvest moon—  
Piled up and overflowing in a flood  
Of riches ; brilliant-plumaged birds, that sing  
As the faint playing on a far sweet lute,

Warble their tales of conquest and of love ;  
Perch on each shoulder ; sweep each rainbow wing  
Like light'ning through the breathless dark above.  
Heaped up in vases gems shine hard and bright ;  
Sudden they flare out—gleaming red like blood—  
For now the darkness turns to swelling light,  
Great torches gild each shadow, tear the sky,  
As drums tear through the silence of the night ;  
Breaking its crystal quiet—making us cry  
Or catch our sobbing breath in sudden fear.  
A shadow stumbles, and the jewels shower  
On to the pavers with a sharp sweet sound.  
They mingle with the fountain drops that flower  
Up in a scarlet bloom above the ground,  
A beauteous changing blossom ; then they rain  
On to the broad mysterious terraces,  
Where sea-gods rise to watch in cold disdain  
Before those vast vermillion palaces,  
—Watch where the slumbering coral gods of noon,  
Drunk with the sudden golden light and flare  
Of flaming torches, try to pluck and tear  
That wan enchanted lotus flower, the moon,  
Down from its calm still waters ; thus they fall,  
Like flowing plumes, the fountains of our festival.

Slowly the torches die. They echo long,  
These last notes of a Bacchanalian song,  
Of drifting drowsy beauty, born of sleep,  
—Vast as the sea, as changing and as deep.  
In thanksgiving for shelt'ring summer skies

Still, far away, a fervent red light glows.  
Small winds brush past against our lips and eyes,  
Caress them like a laughing summer rose,  
And rainbow moths flit by, in circling flight.  
A harp sobs out its crystal syrappings ;  
Faintly it sounds, as the poor petal-wings,  
Fragile yet radiant, of a butterfly  
Beating against the barriers of night.

Then from the Ocean came the Syren song,  
Heavy with perfume, yet faint as a sigh,  
Kissing our minds, and changing right from wrong ;  
Chaining our limbs ; making our bodies seem  
Inert and spellbound, dead as in a dream.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bound by the silver fetters of your voice  
To this new slavery of dreams,  
We, listening, rejoice.  
The magic strains  
Swell in this darkness star-devoid.  
The music streams  
Upon the world in patterns passionate yet clear,  
And stains  
Each soul. The mind, decoyed  
By thoughts that grind and tear  
Away old values,  
Is sent down other thoughts  
So subtly swift,  
That in their fleeting passage

They can cut adrift our souls  
Upon a sea of wonder and of fear.  
Within the arid minds of men  
This music sounds but once, for then  
They hear no other song.  
In it, tumultuous rush of wings,  
The glamour of old lovely things  
In deserts buried long,  
The grace of beasts that bound and leap  
With movements blithe and strong  
—Of those that creep  
Away in hissing-reptile rage—  
All these, all these are found.  
They hear  
The secrets, solved, of each dead age,  
Each mystery is clear.  
For in this music's flow, the din  
Of spheres that tear and speed and spin  
Through pulsing space is heard,  
And all things men have loved and feared  
Are mirror'd in each sound.

## SONG

OUR hidden voices, wreathed with love's soft flowers,  
Wind-toss'd thro' valleys, tremble across seas  
To turbann'd cities; touch tall lonely towers,  
Call to you thro' the sky, the wind, the trees.

Misted and golden as the hanging moon,  
That like a summer fruit floats from the sky,  
Thrills out our distant age-enchanted tune,  
—Nor will it let you pass our beauty by.  
But if it should not reach to stir your mind,  
Then hold a summer rose against the ear,  
Till through its crimson sweetness you can hear  
The falling flow of rhythm—so designed  
That from this secret island, like a star  
Shining above a shrouded world, our song  
Cleaves through the darkest night and echoes long,  
Bidding you follow whether near or far.  
Come hither where the mermaids churn the foam,  
Lashing their tails across the calm, or dive  
To groves and gardens of bright flowers; then roam  
Beneath the shade of stone-branched trees, or drive  
Some slow sea-monster to its musselled home.  
Here, as a ladder, they climb up and down  
The rainbow's steep refracted steps of light,

Till, when the dusk sends down its rippling frown,  
They quiver back to us in silver flight.  
The moon sails down once more ; our mermaids  
bring

Rich gifts of ocean fruit. Again we sing.  
Enchantment, love, vague fear, and memories  
That cling about us like the fumes of wine  
With myriad love-enhancing mysteries  
We pour out in one song—intense—divine,  
Down the deep moonlit chasms of the waves  
Our song floats on the opiate breeze. Why seek  
To goad your carven galleys, fast-bound slaves  
Who search each sweeping line of bay and creek,  
Only to stagger on a hidden rock, or find  
The limp dead sails swept off by sudden wind?  
Thus always you must search the cruel sea,  
For if you find us mankind shall be free!

But when you sleep we grasp you by the hand,  
And to the trickling honey of the flute  
We lead you to a distant shimmering land  
Where lotus-eaters munch their golden fruit,  
Then fall upon the fields of summer flowers  
In drunken sunlit slumber, while a fawn  
Prances and dances round them.

Oh, those hours  
When through the crystal valleys of the dawn  
Down from the haunted forests of the night  
There dash the dew-drenched centaurs on their way,  
Mad with the sudden rush of golden light

—Affright the lotus-eaters, as they sway  
 Towards the woodlands in a stumbling flight.  
 In these deep groves we follow through the cool  
 Shadow of high columnar trees, to find  
 The fallen sky within a forest pool  
 That's faintly veiled and fretted by a wind,  
 Lest our white flashing limbs should turn you blind.

\* \* \* \*

As the sweet sound of bells that fall and fade  
 In watery circles on the verge of night,  
 So rounded ripples spread beneath the shade  
 Of flowing branches dripping with green light.

Thus do we wander ; but when day is spent  
 We grope our way thro' vast tall palaces,  
 Palaces sinister and somnolent,  
 Where lurk dim fears and unknown menaces.

These high pale walls and this pale shining floor  
 Seem built of bones, by ages planed and ground  
 To a white smoothness.

On this rock-bound shore  
 The bodies of dead sailors oft are found.

These sombre arches pierce the sullen sky.

These pillars are the pillars of the night.

Of what avail your strife and agony ?  
 Why seek to search and struggle for the light ?  
 Our music chains you : binds your limbs from flight.

## PROSPECT ROAD

GIGANTIC houses, tattered by all time,  
Raise their immense and ruined bulk and height  
In one unending universal street,  
Against a strange and sunken yellow sky  
—Like sunset trickling through into the sea,  
Down to the depths—yellow and grey and green.  
Blind windows face the interminable road ;  
Innumerable those windows seem to stretch  
All smeared and stained and stamped with time and  
blood,  
—Stains that seem faces—horrid twitching masks  
Moving their lewd derisive lips and tongues,  
Spitting out treacheries with vampire lips—  
Or eyes that gaze from far blank-stretching walls  
—The tortured eyes of those who see their death  
Approaching æon-by-æon along this road.  
Behind the walls sound voices whispering  
Of dire and hidden, carefully hidden, thoughts—  
Cruel, wicked and unfathomable things  
That lie behind this infamy of stone.  
Then clamour, shrieking voices, or a pause  
That falls like lead through the suspended air ;  
Broken by laughter—rending piercing sounds  
That seem to tear the fabric of our minds.

Slinking along these wicked, stricken walls,  
I reached a shining distant point of light.  
And glory came—vast and unending light,  
Rays—flashing, writhing rays of light.  
And then the music sounded. Ah, that sound !

Cadences rose and fell unendingly—  
Quivering, shining waves of sound and sight—  
Sounds of the universe—the cries of space  
And planets tumbling wildly round our world  
—Showing the meaning of the meaningless.  
“God and eternity”—strange flashing sounds  
The whirl of time, “Melchisedec”—“Glory of God”  
And space—the universe—like framing words—  
“Gog and Magog”—“Infinity”—the rush of waters  
And the sky comes down.

Down with the splintering stars.

1916-1919.

BOOK II  
GREEN-FLY



## WAR-HORSES

How they come out  
—These Septuagenarian Butterflies—  
After resting  
For four years !

Surely they are more spirited  
Than ever ?  
Their enamelled wings  
Are rusty with waiting  
—Their eyelids  
Sag a little  
Like those of a bloodhound ;  
But they swim gaily into the limelight.

Oh, these war-horses !  
They have seen it through.  
Theirs has been a splendid part !  
The waiting—the weariness !  
For the Queens of Sheba  
Are used to courts and feasting ;  
But for four years  
Platitudes have remained  
Uncoined,  
For there have been few parties

And only  
Three stout meals  
A day.

But now  
They have come out.  
They have preened  
And dried themselves  
After their blood-bath.  
Old men seem a little younger,  
And tortoise-shell combs  
Are longer than ever ;  
Earrings weigh down aged ears ;  
And Golconda has given them of its best.

They have seen it through !  
Theirs is the triumph,  
And, beneath  
The carved smile of the Mona Lisa  
False teeth,  
Rattle  
Like machine guns,  
In anticipation  
Of food and platitudes.  
Les Veilles Dames Sans Merci !

## CHURCH-PARADE

THE flattened sea is harsh and blue—  
Lies stiff beneath—one tone, one hue,  
While concertina waves unfold  
The painted shimmering sands of gold.

Each bird that whirls and wheels on high  
Must strangle, stifle in, its cry,

For nothing that's of Nature born  
Should seem so on the Sabbath morn.

The terrace glitters hard and white,  
Bedaubed and flecked with points of light

That flicker at the passers-by—  
Reproachful as a curate's eye.

And china flowers, in steel-bound beds,  
Flare out in blues and flaming reds ;

Each blossom, rich and opulent,  
Stands like a soldier ; and its scent

Is turned to camphor in the air.  
No breath of wind would ever dare

## CHURCH-PARADE

To make the trees' plump branches sway,  
Whose thick green leaves hang down to pray.

The stiff, tall churches vomit out  
Their rustling masses of devout,

Tall churches whose stained Gothic night  
Refuses to receive the light !

Watch how the stately walk along  
Toward the terrace, join the throng

That paces carefully up and down  
Above a cut-out cardboard town !

With prayer-book rigid in each hand,  
They look below at sea and sand.

The round contentment in their eyes  
Betrays their favourite fond surmise,

That all successful at a trade  
Shall tread an eternal Church-Parade,

And every soul that's sleek and fat  
Shall gain a heavenly top-hat.

From out the Church's Gothic night,  
Past beds of blossoms china-bright,  
Beneath the green trees' porous shade,  
We watch the sea-side Church-Parade.

## AT THE HOUSE OF MRS. KINFOOT

At the house of Mrs. Kinfoot  
Are collected  
Men and women  
Of all ages.  
They are supposed  
To sing, paint, or to play the piano.  
In the drawing-room  
The fireplace is set  
With green tiles  
Of an acanthus pattern.  
The black curls of Mrs. Kinfoot  
Are symmetrical.  
—Descended, it is said,  
From the Kings of Ethiopia—  
But the British bourgeoisie has triumphed.  
Mr. Kinfoot is bald  
And talks  
In front of the fireplace  
With his head on one side,  
And his right hand  
In his pocket.  
The joy of catching tame elephants,  
And finding them to be white ones,

## 36 AT THE HOUSE OF MRS. KINFOOT

Still gleams from the jungle-eyes  
Of Mrs. Kinfoot,  
But her mind is no jungle  
Of Ethiopia,  
But a sound British meadow.

Listen then to the gospel of Mrs. Kinfoot :  
“The world was made for the British bourgeoisie,  
They are its Swiss Family Robinson ;  
The world is not what it was.  
We cannot understand all this unrest !

Adam and Eve were born to evening dress  
In the southern confines  
Of Belgravia.  
Eve was very artistic, and all that,  
And felt the fall  
Quite dreadfully.  
Cain was such a man of the world  
And belonged to every club in London ;  
His father simply adored him,  
—But had never really liked Abel,  
Who was rather a milk-sop.  
Nothing exists which the British bourgeoisie  
Does not understand ;  
Therefore there is no death  
—And, of course, no life.

The British bourgeoisie  
Is not born,  
And does not die,

AT THE HOUSE OF MRS. KINFOOT 37

But, if it is ill,  
It has a frightened look in its eyes.

The War was splendid, wasn't it ?  
Oh yes, splendid, splendid."

Mrs. Kinfoot is a dear,  
And so artistic.

## GREEN-FLY

## I.

LIKE ninepins houses stand up square  
In lines ; their windows mouths to bite  
At servants, who lean out to stare  
At anything that moves in sight.

Where once was green-limbed tree or ledge  
Of greener moss or flowery lane,  
Set back behind a private hedge  
Each house repeats itself again.

Each house repeats itself again,  
But smaller still and yet more dry ;  
For—just as those who live within—  
So have these houses progeny.

Throughout each dusty endless year,  
Whose days seem merely wet or fine,  
These children constantly appear  
In an unending dusty line.

As on a rose that is ill-grown  
Nature, insulted and defied,  
Showers down a blight, so sends she down  
On houses, those who live inside.

## II.

Within each high, well-papered room,  
Compressed, all darkness lay,  
Darkness of night, and crypt, and tomb,  
Nor ever entered day.

But through the endless black there crept,  
With groping hand and groping thought,  
With eyes that blinked, but never wept,  
And minds that fell, but never fought,

The wonderless, the hard, the nice,  
Who scurry at a ray of light,  
Then, like a flock of frightened mice,  
Career back into night.

From out this damning dreadful dark  
(While history, thundering, rolls by)  
They wait for an anæmic lark  
To sing from weak blue sky.

Or if a dog is hurt, why then  
They see the evil, and they cry.  
But yet they watch ten million men  
Go out to end in agony !

Their own strange God they have set up,  
Of clay, of iron, and mothéd hide;  
Whose eyes, each convex as a cup,  
Reflect the herd endeified.

Their twisted feet in boots He made  
To walk the narrow asphalt way,  
And gave each room a curtain's shade  
To muffle out the light of day.

For this God understands their need ;  
Created lids for each pale eye ;  
He sculpted each mouth to say "Agreed,"  
And gives them coffins if they die.

When, if for punishment they go  
To other lands, why, it should be  
The judgment that, down there below,  
They see this world as they might see !

A world of contrast, shade and light—  
Clashing romance and cruelty,  
But stricken with the dreadful blight  
Of fear to feel and fear to cry.

Where for a moment lives are filled  
With love or hate—where born of pain  
The children grow up—to be killed !  
Where freedom—dead—is born again.

Wherein life's pattern crude and shrill  
Is weft by neither foe nor friend,  
But by some rough colossal will  
Towards some vast invisible end.

But in those houses dark there creep,  
With bodies wrapt in woollen dress,  
With eyes that blink but never weep,  
The sentimental wonderless !

## DE LUXE

## I.

## HYMN.

ABOVE from plaster-mountains,  
 Wine-shadowed by the sea,  
 Spurt white-wool clouds, as fountains  
 Whirl from a rockery.

These clouds were surely given  
 To keep the hills from harm,  
 For when a cloud is riven  
 The fatted rain falls warm.

Through porous leaves the sun drops  
 Each dripping stalactite  
 Of green. The chiselled tree-tops  
 Seem cut from malachite.

Stiff leaves with ragged edges  
 (Each one a wooden sword)  
 Are carved to prickly hedges,  
 On which, with one accord,

Their clock-work songs of calf-love  
 Stout birds stop to recite,  
 From cages which the sun wove  
 Of shade and latticed light.

Each brittle booth and joy-store  
 Shines brightly. Below these  
 The ocean at a toy shore  
 Yaps like a Pekinese.

## II.

## NURSERY RHYME.

The dusky king of Malabar  
 Is chief of Eastern Potentates ;  
 Yet he wears no clothes except  
 The jewels that decency dictates.

A thousand Malabaric wives  
 Roam beneath green-tufted palms ;  
 Revel in the vileness  
 That Bishop Heber psalms.

From honey-combs of light and shade  
 They stop to watch black bodies dart  
 Into the sea to search for pearls.  
 By means of diabolic art

Magicians keep the sharks away ;  
 Mutter, utter, each dark spell,  
 So that if a thief should steal,  
 One more black would go to Hell.

But Mrs. Freudenthal, in furs,  
 From brioche dreams to mild surprise  
 Awakes ; the music throbs and purrs.  
 The cellist, with albino eyes,

Rivets attention ; is, in fact,  
The very climax ; pink eyes flash  
Whenever nervous and pain-racked  
He hears the drums and cymbals clash.

Mrs. Freudenthal day-dreams  
—Ice-spoon half-way to her nose—  
Till the girl in ochre screams,  
Hits out at the girl in rose.

This is not at all the way  
To act in large and smart hotels ;  
Angrily the couples sway,  
Eagerly the riot swells.

Girls who cannot act with grace  
Should learn behaviour ; stay at home ;  
A convent is the proper place.  
Why not join the Church of Rome ?

A waiter nearly drops the tray  
—Twenty tea-cups in one hand.  
Now the band joins in the fray,  
Fighting for the Promised Land.

Mrs. Freudenthal resents  
The scene ; and slowly rustles out,  
But the orchestra relents,  
Waking from its fever bout.

BOOK III  
PROMENADES



## NOCTURNE

THE valleys that were known in sunlit hours  
Are vast and vague as seas ;  
Wan as the blackthorn flowers  
That quiver in the first spring-scented breeze :  
Far as the frosted hollows of the moon.  
The sighing woods are still—  
Wrapp'd in their age-long boon  
Of mystery and sleep. A naked hill,  
Loud and discordant, looms against the sky,  
And little lights like stars  
Break the monotony  
Of blue and silver, black and grey. Strange bars  
Of light resemble silver masks, and leer  
Across the forest lane.  
Tall nettles, rank from rain,  
Scent all the woods with some ancestral fear.  
  
Trees rustle by the water. A voice sings  
Faintly, to ward off fright.  
  
The water breathes pale rings  
Of sad, wan light ;  
Faintly they grow,  
Then merge into the night :  
The last poor twisted echo takes to flight.

To W. H. DAVIES.

THE LAMENT OF THE MOLE-CATCHER

AN old, sad man who catches moles  
 Went lonely down the lane—  
 All lily-green were the lanes and knolls,  
 But sorrow numbed his brain.  
 He paid no heed to flower or weed  
 As he went his lonely way.  
 No note he heard from any bird  
 That sang, that sad spring day.

“I trap’d the moles for forty years  
 Who could not see the sky,  
 I reckoned not blind blood or tears,  
 And the Lord has seen them die.  
 For forty years I’ve sought to slay  
 The small, the dumb, the blind,  
 But now the Lord has made me pay,  
 And I am like their kind.  
 I cannot see or lane or hill,  
 Or flower or bird or moon ;  
 Lest life shall lay me lower still,  
 O Lord—come take it soon.”

## THE BEGINNING

**G**REAT spheres of fire, to which the sun is nought,  
Pass thund’ring round our world. A golden mist—  
The margin to the universe—falls round  
The verges of our vision. Rocks ablaze  
Leap upward to the sun, or fall beneath  
The rush of our rapidity, that seems  
Catastrophe, and not the joyous birth  
Of yet another star. The air is full  
Of clashing colour, full of sights and sounds  
Too plain and loud for men to heed or hear,  
The cosmic cries of pain that follow birth :  
A multi-coloured world.

### The scorching heat

Surpasses all the equatorial days :  
Steam rises from the surface of the sea.  
Gigantic rainbow mists resemble forms  
That bring to mind strange elemental sprites  
Exulting in the chaos of creation.  
They glide above the tumult-ridden sea  
Which now is shaken as are autumn leaves ;  
Great hollows open and reveal its depths—  
Devoid of any form of life or death.  
Till wave on wave it gathers strength again

## THE BEGINNING

And shakes a mountain, splits it to the base  
(Still weak from struggle as a new-born babe).  
Then night comes on, and shows the flaming path  
Of all the rocks that vainly seek the sun.  
Broad as the arch of space, a myriad moons  
Sail slowly by the sea ; the glowing world  
Shows up the pallor of their ivory.  
The din grows greater from the universe :  
There rises up the smell of fire and iron,—  
Not dreary like the smell of burnt-out things,  
But like the smell of some gigantic forge—  
Cheerful, of good intent, and full of life.

Now all the joyous cries of sea and earth,  
The universal harmonies of birth,  
Rise up to haunt the slumber of their God.

## THE END

ROUND the great ruins crawl those things of slime ;  
Green ruins lichenous and scarred by moss—  
An evil lichen that proclaims world doom,  
Like blood dried brown upon a dead man's face.  
And nothing moves save those monstrosities,  
Armoured and grey, and of a monster size.

But now, a thing passed through the cloying air  
With flap and clatter of its scaly wings—  
As if the whole world echoed from some storm.  
One scarce could see it in the dim green light  
Till suddenly it swooped and made a dart  
And brushed away one of those things of slime,  
Just as a hawk might sweep upon its prey.

It seems as if the light grows dimmer yet—  
No radiance from the dreadful green above,  
Only a lustrous light or iridescence  
As if from off a carrion-fly,—surrounds  
That vegetation which is never touched  
By any breeze. The air is thick, and brings  
The tainted subtle sweetness of decay.  
Where, yonder, lies the noisome river-course,  
There shows a faintly phosphorescent glow.

Long writhing bodies fall and twist and rise,  
And one can hear them playing in the mud.  
Upon the ruined walls there gleam and shine  
The track of those grey vast monstrosities—  
As some gigantic snail had crawled along.

All round the shining bushes waver lines  
Suggesting shadows, slight and grey, but full  
Of that which makes one nigh to dead with fear.

Watch how those awful shadows culminate  
And dance in one long wish to hurt the world.

A world that now is past all agony !

## FOUNTAINS

“ The graven fountain-masks suffer and weep.  
 Carved with a smile, the poor mouths clutch  
 At a half-remembered song,  
 Striving to forget the agony of ever laughing.”

SACHEVERELL SITWELL.

SOME fountains sing of love  
 In full and flute-like notes that charge the night  
 With all the red-mouthed essence of the rose ;  
 Then turn to voices murmuring above,  
 Among the trees,  
 Of hidden sweet delight.

Another fountain flows  
 With the faint music of a first spring breeze ;  
 Each falling drop is jewelled by the moon  
 To some fine luminous ecstasy of light.  
 It sings of noon,  
 Of sunlit blossoms on a first spring day  
 And all things sweet and pleasant to the sight.

Another fountain sings  
 Of the cool pleasures of those moonlit hours  
 When dappled sylvan things  
 Trample through thickets and through secret bowers

To prance and play,  
Or, squatting round in rings,  
To wreath their hornéd heads with wan sweet flowers  
Till dawn comes grey and sweeps them to the wood.

Another fountain sobs  
Its song of passions that have passed away.  
Then with a sound like threatening rolling drums, it throbs  
And bursts into a flood  
Of fierce wild music; and its savage spray  
Becomes the blood  
Renewed, of crimes long past.

Another fountain sings its song of fear,  
Of rustics flying fast  
Before some foe—  
A deadly, unknown foe that comes so near  
They feel his panting breath,  
And run for many a lengthy, panic mile.

Those graven fountain-masks are white with woe !  
Carved with a happy smile  
They strive to weep . . .  
End their eternal laughing—for awhile  
To lose themselves in sleep  
Or in the silver peacefulness of death.

## SONG OF THE FAUNS

WHEN the woods are white beneath the moon  
And grass is wet with crystal dew,  
When in the pool  
So clear and cool  
The moon reflects itself anew,  
We raise ourselves from daylight's swoon,  
We shake away  
The sleep of day,  
Out from our bosky homes we spring ;  
Horns wreathed with flowers,  
Throughout the hours  
Of moonlight, worshipping we sing.  
Pale iv'ry goddess, whose wan light  
Looks down upon us worshipping—  
Each dappled faun  
Who shuns the dawn,  
Is here, and rarest gifts we bring—  
The feathers of the birds of night  
Wrought to a crown  
Of softest down  
We offer you, and crystal bright,  
The dew within a lily cup  
Reflecting stars  
In shining bars ;

All things most strange we offer up—  
Rich gifts of fruit and honeyed flowers  
To place within your secret bowers.  
We shake down apples from the trees,  
And pears, and plums with velvet skin ;  
Up to the sky  
We cast these high  
And pray you'll stoop to net them in.  
We dance : then fall upon our knees  
And pray and sing—all this to show  
The love that all loyal fauns must owe  
To you, white goddess of the night.  
But no more play,  
We must away,  
The eastern sky is growing bright.

### “A SCULPTOR’S CRUELTY”

THE faun runs through the forest of the noon,  
Then leaps into some lovely shrouded glade  
Splashed with hot light. He dances in the shade  
Of tower-like trees, whose branches sway and swoon  
Beneath their weight of green. No breath of air  
Ruffles the vivid blossom or the moss  
On which he pirouettes, all is so fair !

He leaps about ; then, tired and at a loss  
For what to do, he roams the wood—espies  
A figure like himself—but stiff and grey !  
Lacking the hairy chest and dappled thighs  
That are his pride. “But surely this can play  
And scamper, dance and snuffle through the day  
As well as me ?” So he comes near and eyes  
The lichenèd features of a faun of stone.

Oh ! it is sad to be so young—alone !

## PIERROT OLD

THE harvest moon is at its height,  
The evening primrose greets its light  
With grace and joy : then opens up  
The mimic moon within its cup.  
Tall trees, as high as Babel tower,  
Throw down their shadows to the flower—  
Shadows that shiver—seem to see  
An ending to infinity.

The Pagan Pan has now unbent  
And stoops to sniff the night-stock scent  
That brings a memory sad and old,  
When he was young, and free, and bold,  
To play his pipe in forests black,  
Or follow in some goatherd's track  
Who, fill'd with panic fear, then flees  
Through all the terror-threatening trees.

Huge silver moths, like ghosts of flowers,  
Hover about the warm dark bowers,  
And wait to breathe the lime-tree scent  
That perfum'd many a compliment

Address'd to beauties young and gay,  
Their faces powdered by the ray  
Of that same moon that looks upon  
Their dreary lichen-cover'd tomb.  
The dryads throw their water wide  
And strive to stem the surging tide  
That dashes up the fountain base,  
Hoping to catch the moon's pale face—  
A game now played without a score  
For three good centuries or more.  
And all the earth smells warm and sweet  
—A fitting place for fairy feet.

But now a figure white and frail  
Leaps out into the moonlight pale.  
From wakeful thoughts, old age and grief,  
He finds in this strange world relief.  
Yet all the shadow, scent and sound,  
Poor Pierrot's mind do sad confound.  
Watch how he dances to the moon  
While singing some faint fragrant tune !

But Pierrot now is tired and sad  
—Remembers all the evenings mad  
He spent with that fantastic band  
So gaily wand'ring o'er the land.  
They all are dead—and at an end,  
And he is left without a friend.  
For tho' the hours can pass away,  
Poor Pierrot still must grieve and stay.

Upon the dewy grass he lies :  
The perfumes stir strange memories.  
Once more he hears a laughing cry  
That brings great tear-drops to his eye.  
That step—that look—that voice—that smile.  
Ah ! they've been buried a long while !  
And who's the man in pantaloons,  
And he who sings such festive tunes ?  
Why, it's that laughing man of sin,  
That roguish rascal Harlequin !

Forgiving Pierrot hides his head  
Deep in the grass and mourns the dead ;  
Forgetting all the pranks they play'd,  
And how he was himself betray'd.

The butterfly lives but one day,  
But Pierrot still seems doom'd to stay.

He falls asleep there, tragic-white,  
And wakes to find the bleak daylight.

## NIGHT

ALL the dim terrors dwelling far below,  
Interr'd by many thousand years of life,  
Arise to revel in this evil dark :  
The wail forlorn of dogs that mourn for men—  
A shuffling footfall on a creaking board,  
The handle of a door that shakes and turns—  
A door that opens slightly, not enough :  
The rustling sigh of silk along a floor,  
The knowledge of being watched by one long dead,  
By something that is outside Nature's pale.  
The unheard sounds that haunt an ancient house :  
The feel of one who listens in the dark,  
Listens to that which happened long ago,  
Or what will happen after we are dust.  
The awful waiting for a near event,  
Or for a crash to rend the silence deep  
Enveloping a house that always waits—  
A house that whispers to itself and weeps.  
The murmur of the yew, or woodland cries,  
A sombre note of music on the breeze ;  
A shudder from the ivy that entwines  
The horror that is felt within its grip.  
The sound of prowling things that walk abroad,  
The nauseous flapping of Night's bat-like wings—  
These are the signs the gods have given us  
To know the limit of our days and powers.

*To MARGARET GREVILLE*

FROM CARCASSONNE

I

Now night,

The sighing night,  
Descends to hide and heal  
The crimson wounds  
Ripped in the sky,  
Where the high helmet-towers  
(With clouds as streaming feathers)  
Have torn the Heavens  
In their incessant sunset battle.

Below,

Upon the mound,  
Small golden flowers  
Release their daylight slowly  
At the Night's behest,  
Till they become pale discs  
That quiver  
When the evening wind  
Draws his thin fingers  
Down the dew-drenched grass  
—As an old harper,  
Who awakes

From drunken sunlit slumber,  
Blindly plucks  
His silver-sounding strings,  
Making the sound  
That, further, darker down  
The trees make,  
When they draw back  
Their upturned leaves  
In fountain-foaming hurry.

## II

The curling, hump-backed dolphins,  
Drunk with purple fumes  
Of wine-stained sunset,  
Plunge through the wider waters of the night—  
Waters that well down every narrow street  
In darkening billows,  
Till they become quiet, full—  
Canals that, mirror-like,  
Reflect each sound  
Of snarling song  
In all the town.

And as the dolphins dive  
There splashes back  
Upon their goat-eared riders,  
Dislodged in sudden fury,  
The foaming froth of summer-cooling winds  
—Issuing from where the northern trees

Bellow their resined breath  
Across the seas  
To ripple through far fields  
Of twilight flowers—  
Sweeping across  
To where these old high towers  
Of Carcassonne  
Still stand to break their flow.

Neptune, from his high pedestal,  
Can watch the waters of the night  
Rise, further, further,  
And the faun-riders sink below  
The conquering, cool tide.

## PROGRESS

THE city's heat is like a leaden pall—  
Its lowered lamps glow in the midnight air  
Like mammoth orange-moths that flit and flare  
Through the dark tapestry of night. The tall  
Black houses crush the creeping beggars down,  
Who walk beneath and think of breezes cool,  
Of silver bodies bathing in a pool,  
Or trees that whisper in some far, small town  
Whose quiet nursed them, when they thought that gold  
Was merely metal, not a grave of mould  
In which men bury all that's fine and fair.  
When they could chase the jewelled butterfly  
Through the green bracken-scented lanes, or sigh  
For all the future held so rich and rare ;  
When, though they knew it not, their baby cries  
Were lovely as the jewelled butterflies.

## THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

I LAY awake in that dim room of fear  
Which seemed to hold the essence of the night,  
Clutched in the grip of its tall sentient walls :  
Dark walls and high, that stretch for ever up—  
Up to the darkness, vague and menacing,  
As if no light could ever penetrate  
That mist of shadows, only cast a gloom  
More cavernous upon the atmosphere  
That seems to thicken into cloudy shapes,  
Substantiate—then disappear and die.  
And all the room is full of whisperings ;  
Of moving things that hope I do not heed ;  
And sudden gusts of wind blow cold upon  
My head, lifting the heavy mantle of the air,  
Revealing for an instant some vague thought  
Snatched from the haunting lumberland of dreams.  
Far in the distance, from the open night,  
Sounds an insistent hooting from the wood ;  
The owl is calling to its kindred things.  
The bat emits its sinful piercing note—  
So high one cannot hear it, only feel  
The rhythm beat within the shrinking ear.  
A faint breeze blows in from the countryside,

Rustling the curtains with the forest's breath,  
Stirring the grass of many an unknown tomb,  
Some new—some immemorably old,  
Whose dwellers never heard an owl at night,  
Only the reptile sounds and beating wings  
Of some forefather of that bird of night—  
Some flapping scaly monster with huge wings.  
Then, sudden, through the rustling of the room  
Silence shrills out its startling trumpet call  
Of terror, and the house is frozen still.  
Despair dropp'd down like rain upon my heart,  
Catching my breath and clutching at my throat.  
Fear magnified my senses, and my brain  
Could hear beyond the threshold of this world.  
Then through the threatening silence of the house,  
The silent waiting for the coming play—  
There came that halting well-remembered tread,  
The dreadful limp, and dragging of the feet,  
That cruel sin-white face looked through the door !  
And in my scream—that rent the trembling air,  
Reaching the woods and tainting them with death,  
Filling the fountain with strange ripplings  
That make the moon's reflection but a mask  
Like to that face of shame—my soul passed out—  
Out of my ashen lips, to find its end.

## LONDON SQUARES

To-NIGHT this city seems delirious. The air  
Is fever'd, hot and heavy—yet each street,  
Each tortuous lane and slumb'ring stone-bound square  
Smells of the open woods, so wild and sweet.  
Through the dim spaces, where each town-bred tree  
Sweeps out, mysterious and tall and still,  
The country's passionate spirit—old and free—  
Flings off the fetters of the calm and chill.

There in the garden, fauns leap out and sing—  
Chant those strange sun-born songs from far away !  
With joyous ecstasy in this new spring,  
They cast the coats and top-hats of the day.

There by the railings, where the women pace  
With painted faces, passionless and dead,  
Out of the dark, Pan shows his leering face,  
Mocks their large hats and faces painted red.  
Then as they walk away, he mocks their lives,  
Racking each wearied soul with lost desires,  
And—cruelty more subtle—he contrives  
With aching memories of love's first fires  
To tune their hearts up to a different key.

So, when they sleep, the withered years unfold  
—Again, as children round a mother's knee  
They listen to their future as foretold  
—A future rich and innocent and gay.

Then wake up to the agony of day !

## TEARS

SILENCE o'erwhelms the melody of Night,  
Then slowly drips on to the woods that sigh  
For their past vivid vernal ecstasy.  
The branches and the leaves let in the light  
In patterns, woven 'gainst the paler sky  
—Create mysterious Gothic tracery  
Between those high dark pillars, that affright  
Poor weary mortals who are wand'ring by.

Silence drips on the woods like sad faint rain  
Making each frail tired sigh a sob of pain ;  
Each drop that falls, a hollow painted tear  
Such as are shed by Pierrots when they fear  
Black clouds may crush their silver lord to death.  
The world is waxen ; and the wind's least breath  
Would make a hurricane of sound. The earth  
Smells of the hoarded sunlight that gave birth  
To the gold-glowing radiance of that leaf  
Which falls to bury from our sight its grief.

*To VIOLET GORDON-WOODHOUSE*

## CLAVICHORDS

Its pure and dulcet tone  
So clear and cool  
Rings out—tho' muffled by the centuries  
Passed by ;  
Each note  
A distant sigh  
From some dead lovely throat.

A sad cascade of sound  
Floods the dim room with faded memories  
Of beauty that has gone  
Like the reflected rhythm in some dusk blue pool,  
Of dancing figures (long laid in the ground)—  
Like moonlit skies  
Or some far song harmonious and sublime—  
Breaking the leaden slumber of the night.  
A perfume, faint yet fair  
As of an old press'd blossom that's reborn  
Seeming to flower alone  
Within the arid wilderness of Time.

The music fills the air  
Soft as the outspread fluttering wings

Of flower-bright butterflies  
That dive and float  
Through the sweet rose-flushed hours of summer dawn.  
The rippling sound of silver strings  
Break o'er our senses as small foaming waves  
Break over rocks,  
And into hidden caves  
Of silent waters—never to be found—  
Waters as clear and glistening as gems.

And in this ancient pool of melodies,  
So soothing, deep,  
We search for strange lost images and diadems  
And old drowned pleasures,  
—Each one shining bright  
And rescued from the crystal depths of sleep.

As the far sun-kissed sails of some full-riggéd boat,  
Blown by a salt cool breeze,  
—Laden with age-old treasures  
And rich merchandise—  
Fade into evening on the foam-flecked seas—  
So this last glowing note  
Hovers awhile—then dies.

## PROMENADES

LONG promenades against the sea  
Kaleidoscopic, chattering !  
Pavilions rising from the sea,  
On which a fawning, flattering,  
Hot crush of orientals move,  
And sell their cheap and tawdry wares,  
To other Jews, and aldermen,  
And rich, retired, provincial mayors.  
Oh ! many colours in the sun ;  
Copper and gold predominate !  
Parasols, held 'gainst the sun  
Throw down their shadows incohate  
On leering faces looking sly—  
All shining with the heat of June.  
The shifting masses move and talk  
And whistle tunes all out of tune.

Long promenades against the sea,  
And oranges and mandolines !  
Pavilions rising from the sea  
And penny-in-the-slot machines !

## CLOWN PONDI

WHEN youth and strength had changed my blood to fire  
 And every day passed long and glorious,  
 Another link in the eternal chain  
 Of life, I turned my love of luring and my sense  
 For all the unfathomable ways of God,  
 My burning sense for laughter and my joy  
 In crowds, in tumult, and in blazing lights,  
 To make my fellows see these qualities.  
 Thus I became "Clown Pondi," and my fame  
 Grew high in every theatre in the land.

I seem'd to draw fresh vigour from the crowds—  
 Loving the sea of faces, eyes with tears,  
 And gaping mouths wide open—loosely hung ;  
 The acrid, opalescent haze of smoke,  
 Hanging above the auditorium.  
 And over it the crowded galleries  
 That float far up, like painted prows of ships—  
 All overweighted and alive with men.  
 I loved the limelight, hard and white and strong,  
 The throbbing music and the theatre's scent,  
 That artificial, paper, printed scent  
 That sweeps across the footlights to the stalls.

Then was I pleased to strut about the stage,  
With face dead white, and strangely purple nose—  
Flamboyant in the garb of foolery—  
To run about too quickly—and fall down ;  
To make queer noises—inarticulate  
Strange sounds and oaths, the signal for my share  
Of cackling laughter.

Thus the years pass'd by  
And—all unheeding—swept away my youth,  
Till, one sad night, I heard a voice near-by :  
“ Ah ! Poor old man ! It's shocking they should laugh ;  
Mock his bent legs, and poor old toothless jaws !”

And then old-age rush'd down upon my head,  
Each sombre year roll'd past in solemn time ;  
In true perspective—to the jingling tune  
That was my exit ; and so near came death,  
Holding a mirror to my ridicule,  
That show'd each line beneath the smearing paint,  
Each wrinkle underneath the dab of rouge,  
That in my sudden hopelessness I wept.

But as I left the stage with dragging feet,  
With body bent with age, and crouching low,  
I heard the applauding people pause and say,  
“ Who but Clown PONDI could amuse us so ?”

## LAUSIAC THEME

SERAPION-THE-SINDONITE  
Wore a cloth about his loins.  
This Christian Recondite  
Never carried coins.

Never did he ask for bread ;  
Revelled in his own distress.  
High of spirit, low of head,  
With no other dress

Than a loin-cloth, Serapion  
Was free from greed and gluttony ;  
Progressed in the direction  
Of impassivity.

Serapion, though ascetic,  
Could not keep within his cell—  
Spiritual athletic,  
Who wrestled with Hell—

This Sindonitic holy man  
Converted, overcome by pity,  
Thais, the famous courtesan,  
To Christianity.

Thais was not thin or frail  
But full of figure. Flesh and blood  
Rose up in riot—made her rail  
At a selfless God.

From Theban windows, far above,  
She plays and sings to a guitar  
With low voice : the light of love  
Beckons like a star.

Eagerly she welcomed in  
The unexpected Sindonite ;  
But he spoke to her of sin—  
Set her soul alight.

So they went together out  
To the crowded, garish street,  
Where he taught her how to flout  
Fumes of wine and meat.

To the Thebaid they go—  
Where she stands each Christian test,  
Plaiting palm-leaves to and fro,  
Sure of heaven's rest.

In the desert they both died,  
Thais and the holy man.  
They were buried side by side,  
Ascetic and courtesan.

## METAMORPHOSIS

THE woods that ever love the moon, rest calm and white

Beneath a mist-wrapp'd hill :

An owl, horned wizard of the night,

Flaps through the air so soft and still ;

Moaning, it wings its flight

Far from the forest cool,

To find the star-entangled surface of a pool,

Where it may drink its fill

Of stars ; a blossom-laden breeze

Scatters its treasures—each a fallen moon

Among the waiting trees—

Bears back the faded shadow-scents of noon.

The whispering wood is full of dim, vague fears.

The rustling branches sway

And listen for some sound from far away—

A silver piping down the Pagan years

Since Time's first joyous birth—

The listening trees all sigh,

The moment of their hornèd king is nigh.

Then, peal on peal, there sounds the fierce wild mirth

Of Pan their master, lord and king,

And round him in a moonlit ring  
His court, so wan and sly !

But then the trees closed round and hid from sight  
Their deeds—the voices seemed to die.

An owl, horned wizard of the night,  
Flaps through the air so soft and still.  
Moans, as it wings its flight  
Toward the mist-wrapp'd hill.

## THE GIPSY QUEEN

A RAGGED Gipsy walked the road,  
Her eyes blazed fierce and strong,  
But she gazed at me as on she strode,  
She fiercely gazed, and long.

“ Give me a penny, sir,” she said,  
“ To buy me drink and buy me bread,  
For I’ve nothing had to eat or drink,  
And at night I never sleep a wink.  
Cold is the snow and wet the rain,  
But my soul died when my love was slain !”

“ Fair Gipsy, in some southern clime,  
I’ve seen your face before  
In some far other distant time,  
But whom are you weeping for ?”

“ ’Twas Antony I loved,” she said,  
“ For him, in vain, I shed these tears,  
But my loved Antony is dead—  
Is dead these long two thousand years ;

Then I was mighty Egypt's pride,  
Fear'd both by friend and foe—

Yet they believe Cleopatra died  
Two thousand years ago!"

## BLACK MASS

THE atmosphere is charged with hidden things  
—Thoughts that are waiting—wanting to revive  
Primeval terrors from their present graves  
—Those half-thoughts hidden from the mind of man.

The fear of those bright, countless stars that shine  
Celestially serene on summer nights,  
—And those, too far for human eye to see—  
That make men feel as small and ill at ease  
As do the thoughts of immortality ;  
The fear of seas that stretch beyond our sight  
Unspoilt by any memory of a ship—  
Strange, silent seas that lap the unknown shores  
Of some far-distant, undiscovered land ;  
The curious fear of caves and horrid depths  
Where lurk those monsters that we hide away  
And bury in our self-complacency.  
The dread of all that waits unseen, yet heard ;  
The fear of moonlight falling on a face ;  
The sound of sobs at night, the fear of laughter ;  
The misty terror lurking in a wood  
Which night has wrapped in her soft robe of sighs.

The horror that is felt where man is not,  
In lonely lands all dotted with squat trees  
That seem to move in the grey twilight breeze  
—Or sit and watch you like malicious cripples,  
Intent on every movement, every thought—  
Where stones, like evil fungi, raise their bulk  
Cover'd with lichen older than the hills—  
A warning for the ages yet to come ;  
Stones that have seen the sun, and moon, and stars,  
Deflect their course for very weariness.  
These fears are gathered, press'd into a room  
Vibrating with the wish to damage man ;  
To put a seal upon his mind and soul—  
These fears are fused into a living flame.

The room is filled with men of evil thoughts,  
And some poor timid ones, on evil bent.  
They stand in anxious, ghastly expectation.

The guttering light is low, and follows them  
With subtle shadows tall beyond belief :  
Vast elemental shapes that make men feel  
Like dusty atoms blown by wayward winds  
About the world : shadows that sway and swing,  
And sigh and talk, as if themselves alive.  
Small shadows cringe about the room incredibly,  
Grotesque and dwarf-like in their attitudes ;  
Malignant, mocking things that caper round—  
Triumphant heralds of an evil reign.

Secret and swift they flit about the wall ;  
Noiseless, they drag their feet about the floor,  
And murmur subtle infamies of love,  
Sweet-sounding threats, and bribes, and baleful  
thoughts.

Yet all are waiting, evilly alert . . .  
Yet all are waiting—watching for events.

Silence has ceased to be a negative,  
Becomes a thing of substance—fills the room  
And clings like ivy to the listening walls.  
The flickering light flares up—then gutters out.  
The shadows seem to shiver and expand  
To active, evil things that breathe and live.

But now they whirl and dance in ecstasy.  
The highest moment of their mass is near.  
We only feel the swaying of the shades,  
—Rhythm of wicked music that escapes  
Our consciousness, tho' we have known it long—  
The music of the evil things of Night  
Scarcely remembered from some dim, vast world—  
The things that haunted us when we were young  
And nearer to our past realities.  
Like scaly snakes, the hymn to evil writhes  
Through the sub-conscious basis of our mind.  
Eddies of icy breath, or hot as flame,  
Twist into all the corners of the room,

Filling our veins with fire like red-hot iron,  
And wicked as the Prince of Evil Things.

Faintly his glowing presence is revealed to us  
Amid the chorus of his satellites.  
The consummation of our awful hopes.

## PIERROT AT THE WAR

THE leaden years have dragged themselves away ;  
 The blossoms of the world lie all dash'd down  
 And flattened by the hurricane of death :  
 The roses fallen, and their fragrant breath  
 Has passed beyond our senses—and we drown  
 Our tragic thoughts : confine them to the day.

Pierrot was happy here two years ago,  
 Singing through all the summer-scented hours,  
 Dancing throughout the warm moon-haunted night.  
 Swan-like his floating sleeves, so long and white,  
 Sailed the blue waters of the dusk. Wan flowers,  
 Like moons, perfumed the crystal valley far below.

But now these moonlit sleeves lie on the ground,  
 Trampled and torn from many a deadly fight.  
 With fingers clenched, and face a mask of stone,  
 He gazes at the sky—left all alone—  
 Grimacing under every rising light :  
 His body waits the peace his soul has found.

*April, 1917.*

## SPRING HOURS

THE air is silken—soft and dark—  
Calm as the waters of some blue, far sea ;  
    Sweet as a youthful dream,  
The trees stand cold and stark,  
Yet full of the new life which makes each tree  
To tremble with delight ; sets free  
    The summer rapture of the stream.

But now the clouds disperse and drift away,  
    Splashing the woods with patches of pale light,  
Sail off like silver ships, and then display  
    The dazzling myriad blossoms of the night.

Ah ! It is worth full many a sun-gilt hour  
To see the heavens bursting into flower.



BOOK IV  
WAR POEMS



“ THEREFORE IS THE NAME OF IT  
CALLED BABEL”

AND still we stood and stared far down  
Into that ember-glowing town,  
Which every shaft and shock of fate  
Had shorn unto its base. Too late  
Came carelessly Serenity.

Now torn and broken houses gaze  
On to the rat-infested maze  
That once sent up rose-silver haze  
To mingle through eternity.

The outlines once so strongly wrought,  
Of city walls, are now a thought  
Or jest unto the dead who fought . . .  
Foundation for futurity.

The shimmering sands where once there played  
Children with painted pail and spade  
Are dreary desolate—afraid  
To meet night’s dark humanity,

Whose silver cool remakes the dead,  
And lays no blame on any head  
For all the havoc, fire, and lead,  
That fell upon us suddenly,

When all we came to know as good  
Gave way to Evil's fiery flood,  
And monstrous myths of iron and blood  
Seem to obscure God's clarity.

Deep sunk in sin, this tragic star  
Sinks deeper still, and wages war  
Against itself ; strewn all the seas  
With victims of a world disease  
—And we are left to drink the lees  
Of Babel's direful prophecy.

*January, 1916.*

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY HARLEQUINADE

FATE, malign dotard, weary from his days,  
Too old for memory, yet craving pleasure,  
Now finds the night too long and bitter cold  
—Reminding him of death—the sun too hot.  
The beauty of the universe he hates,  
Yet stands regarding earthly carnivals :  
The clatter and the clang of car and train,  
The hurrying throng of homeward-going men,  
The cries of children, colour of the streets,  
Their whistling and their shouting and their joy,  
The lights, the trees, the fanes and towers of churches,  
Thanksgiving for the sun, the moon, the earth,  
The labour, love, and laughter of our lives.

He thinks they mock his age with ribaldry.

From far within his æon-battered brain  
Well up those wanton wistful images  
That first beguiled the folk of Bergamo.  
Now like himself, degraded and distress'd,  
They sink to ignominy ; but the clown  
Remains, reminder of their former state,  
And still earns hurricanes of hoarse applause.

'This dotard now decides to end the earth  
(Wrecked by its own and his futility).  
Recalls the formula of world-broad mirth  
—A senseless hitting of those unaware,  
Unnecessary breaking of their chattels.

The pantomime of life is near its close :  
The stage is strewn with ends and bits of things,  
With mortals maim'd or crucified, and left  
To gape at endless horror through eternity.

The face of Fate is wet with other paint  
Than that incarnadines the human clown :  
Yet still he waves a bladder, red as gold,  
And still he gaily hits about with it,  
And still the dread revealing limelight plays  
Till the whole sicken'd scene becomes afire.  
Antic himself falls on the funeral pyre  
Of twisted, tortured, mortifying men.

*March, 1916.*

## THIS GENERATION

THEIR youth was fevered—passionate, quick to drain  
The last few pleasures from the cup of life  
Before they turn'd to suck the dregs of pain  
And end their young-old lives in mortal strife.  
They paid the debts of many a hundred year  
Of foolishness and riches in alloy.  
They went to death ; nor did they shed a tear  
For all they sacrificed of love and joy.  
Their tears ran dry when they were in the womb,  
For, entering life—they found it was their tomb.

*To FRANCIS MEYNELL*

### SHEEP-SONG

FROM within our pens,  
Stout built,  
We watch the sorrows of the world.  
Imperturbably  
We see the blood  
Drip and ooze on to the walls.  
Without a sigh  
We watch our lambs  
Stuffed and fattened for the slaughter. . . .

In our liquid eyes lie hidden  
The mystery of empty spaces  
All the secrets of the vacuum.

Yet we can be moved ;  
When the head-sheep bleats,  
We bleat with him ;  
When he stampedes  
—Heavy with foot-rot—  
We gallop after him  
Until  
In our frenzy

We trip him up  
—And a new sheep leads us.

We are the greatest sheep in the world ;  
There are no sheep like us.  
We come of an imperial bleat ;  
Our voices,  
Trembling with music,  
Call to our lambs oversea.  
With us they crash across continents.

We will not heed the herdsmen,  
For they warned us,  
“Do not stampede” ;  
Yet we were forced to do so.  
Never will we trust a herdsman again.

Then the black lamb asked,  
Saying, “Why did we start this glorious Gadarene  
descent?”  
And the herd bleated angrily,  
“We went in with clean feet,  
And we will come out with empty heads.  
We gain nothing by it,  
Therefore  
It is a noble thing to do.  
We are stampeding to end stampedes.  
We are fighting for lambs  
Who are never likely to be born.

When once a sheep gets its blood up  
The goats will remember. . . .”

But the herdsman swooped down  
Shouting,  
“Get back to your pens there.”

*September, 1918.*

## THE POET'S LAMENT.

BEFORE the dawning of the death-day  
My mind was a confusion of beauty.  
Thoughts fell from it in riot  
Of colour,  
In wreaths and garlands of flowers and fruit. . .

Then the red dawn came  
—And no thought came to me  
Except anger  
And bitter reproach.  
God filled my mouth  
With the burning pebbles of hatred,  
And choked my soul  
With a whirl-wind of fury.  
He made my tongue  
A flaming sword  
To cut and wither  
The white soft edges  
Of their anæmic souls.  
I ridiculed them,  
I despised them,  
I loathed them  
. . . But they had stolen my soul away.

Yes, they had stolen my soul from me.  
My heart jumps up into my mouth  
In fury ;  
They have stolen my soul away.

But we will wait,  
And later words will come  
—Words that in their burning flight  
Shall scorch and flay,  
Or flare like fireworks  
Above their heads.  
In those days my soul shall be restored to me  
And they shall remember,  
They shall remember !

## JUDAS AND THE PROFITEER

JUDAS descended to this lower Hell  
To meet his only friend—the profiteer—  
Who, looking fat and rubicund and well,  
Regarded him, and then said with a sneer,  
“Iscariot, they did you ! Fool ! to sell  
For silver pence the body of God’s Son,  
Whereas for maiming men with sword and shell  
I gain at least a golden million.”

But Judas answered : “You deserve your gold ;  
It’s not His body but His soul you’ve sold !”

*To H. W. MASSINGHAM*

### RHAPSODE

WHY should we sing to you of little things—  
You who lack all imagination ?  
Why should we sing to you of your poor joys,  
That you may see beauty through a poet's mind—  
Beauty where there was none before ?  
Why should we heed your miserable opinions,  
And your paltry fears ?  
Why listen to your tales and narratives—  
Long lanes of boredom along which you  
Amble amiably all the dull days  
Of your unnecessary lives ?  
We know you now—and what you wish to be told :  
That the larks are singing in the trenches,  
That the fruit trees will again blossom in the spring,  
That Youth is always happy ;  
But you know the misery that lies  
Under the surface—  
And we will dig it up for you !  
We shall sing to you  
Of the men who have been trampled  
To death in the circus of Flanders ;  
Of the skeletons that gather the fruit

From the ruined orchards of France ;  
And of those left to rot under an Eastern sun—  
Whose dust mingles with the sand  
Of distant, strange deserts,  
And whose bones are crushed against  
The rocks of unknown seas ;  
All dead—dead,  
Defending you and what you stand for.

You hope that we shall tell you that they found their  
happiness in fighting,  
Or that they died with a song on their lips,  
Or that we shall use the old familiar phrases  
With which your paid servants please you in the  
Press :  
But we are poets,  
And shall tell the truth.

You, my dear sir,  
You are so upset  
At being talked to in this way  
That when night  
Has coffin'd this great city  
Beneath the folds of the sun's funeral pall,  
You will have to drink a little more champagne,  
And visit a theatre or perhaps a music-hall.  
What you need (as you rightly say, my dear sir) is  
CHEERING-UP.  
There you will see vastly funny sketches  
Of your fighting countrymen ;

And they will be represented  
As those of whom you may be proud.  
For they cannot talk English properly,  
Or express themselves but by swearing ;  
Or perhaps they may be shown as drunk.  
But they will all appear cheerful,  
And you will be pleased ;  
And as you lurch amiably home, you will laugh,  
And at each laugh  
Another countryman will be dead !

When Christ was slowly dying on that tree—  
Hanging in agony upon that hideous Cross—  
Tortured, betrayed, and spat upon,  
Loud through the thunder and the earthquake's roar  
Rang out  
Those blessed humble human words of doubt :  
“My God ! My God ! why hast Thou forsaken Me ?”  
But near by was a cheerfully chattering group  
Of sects,  
Of Pharisees and Sadducees,  
And all were shocked—  
Pained beyond measure.  
And they said :  
“ At least he might have died like a hero  
With an oath on his lips,  
Or the refrain from a comic song—  
Or a cheerful comment of some kind.  
It was very unpleasant for all of us—  
But we had to see it through.

I hope people will not think we have gone too far—  
Or behaved badly in any way."

There in the street below a drunken man reels home,  
And as he goes  
He sings with sentiment :  
" Keep the home fires burning!"  
And the constable helps him on his way.

But we—  
We should be thrown into prison,  
Or cast into an asylum,  
For we want—

PEACE !

*September, 1917.*

## To SIEGFRIED SASSOON

## THE MODERN ABRAHAM

His purple fingers clutch a large cigar—  
 Plump, mottled fingers, with a ring or two.  
 He rests back in his fat armchair. The war  
 Has made this change in him. As he looks through  
 His cheque-book with a tragic look he sighs :  
 “Disabled Soldiers’ Fund” he reads afresh,  
 And through his meat-red face peer angry eyes—  
 The spirit piercing through its mound of flesh.

They should not ask me to subscribe again !  
 Consider me and all that I have done—  
 I’ve fought for Britain with my might and main ;  
 I make explosives—and I gave a son.  
 My factory, converted for the fight  
 (I do not like to boast of what I’ve spent),  
 Now manufactures gas and dynamite,  
 Which only pays me seventy per cent.  
 And if I had ten other sons to send  
 I’d make them serve my country to the end,  
 So all the neighbours should flock round and say :  
 “Oh ! look what Mr. Abraham has done.  
 He loves his country in the elder way ;  
 Poor gentleman, he’s lost another son !”

## THE TRAP

THE world is young and green.  
Its woods are golden beneath the May-time sun ;  
But within its trap of steel the rabbit plunges  
Madly to and fro.  
It will bleed to death  
Slowly,  
Slowly,  
Unless there is some escape.  
Why will not someone release it ?

And presently a kindly passer-by  
Stoops down.  
The rabbit's eye glints at him—  
Gleaming from the impenetrable obscurity of its  
prison.  
He stoops and lifts the catch  
(He cannot hold it long, for the spring is heavy).  
The rabbit could now be free,  
But it does not move ;  
For from the darkness of its death-hutch  
The world looks like another brightly baited trap.  
So, remaining within its steel prison,

It argues thus :

“ Perhaps I may bleed to death,  
But it will probably take a long time,  
And, at any rate,  
I am secure  
From the clever people outside.  
Besides, if I did come out now  
All the people who thought I was a lion  
Would see, by the trap-mark on my leg,  
That I am only an unfortunate rabbit,  
And this might promote disloyalty among the  
children.

When the clamp closed on my leg  
It was a ruse  
To kill me.

Probably the lifting of it betrays the same pur-  
pose !

If I come out now  
They will think they can trap rabbits  
Whenever they like.

How do I know they will not snare me  
Again next year ?  
Besides, it looks to me from here . . . ”

But the catch drops down,  
For the stranger is weary.  
From within the hutch  
A thin stream of blood  
Trickles on to the grass  
Outside,

And leaves a brown stain on its brightness.  
But the dying rabbit is happy,  
Saying:  
"I knew it was only a trap!"

*April, 1918.*

*To RODERICK MEIKLEJOHN*

## THE ETERNAL CLUB

WARMING their withered hands, the dotards say :  
 “ In our youth men were happy till they died.  
 What is it ails the young men of to-day—  
 To make them bitter and dissatisfied ? ”

Two thousand years ago it was the same :  
 “ Poor Joseph ! How he’ll feel about his son !  
 I knew him as a child—his head afame  
 With gold. He seemed so full of life and fun.  
 And even as a young man he was fine,  
 Converting tasteless water into wine.  
 Then something altered him. He tried to chase  
 The money-changers from the Temple door.  
 White ringlets swung and tears shone in their poor  
 Aged eyes. He grew so bitter and found men  
 For friends as discontented—lost all count  
 Of caste—denied his father, faith, and then  
 He preached that dreadful Sermon on the Mount !  
 But even then he would not let things be ;  
 For when they nailed him high up on the tree,  
 And gave him vinegar and pierced his side,  
 He asked God to forgive them—still dissatisfied ! ”

## HEAVEN

A THEATRE rises dark and mute and drear  
Among those houses that stand clustering round.  
Passing this pleasure-house, I seem'd to hear  
The distant rhythm of some lauding sound,  
'The hot applause that greeted every night  
The favourite song, or girl, or joke, or fight.  
The laughter of the young and strong and gay  
Who greeted life—then laid their lives away.

Do they, then, watch the same old blatant show,  
Forgetting all death's wrench and all its pain  
And all their courage shown against the foe ?  
Is this the heaven that they died to gain ?

## THE BLIND PEDLAR

I STAND alone through each long day  
 Upon these pavers ; cannot see  
 The wares spread out upon this tray  
 —For God has taken sight from me !

Many a time I've cursed the night  
 When I was born. My peering eyes  
 Have sought for but one ray of light  
 To pierce the darkness. When the skies

Rain down their first sweet April showers  
 On budding branches ; when the morn  
 Is sweet with breath of spring and flowers,  
 I've cursed the night when I was born.

But now I thank God, and am glad  
 For what I cannot see this day  
 —The young men crippled, old, and sad,  
 With faces burnt and torn away ;

Or those who, rich and old,  
 Have battened on the slaughter,  
 Whose faces, gorged with blood and gold,  
 Are creased in purple laughter !

## WORLD-HYMN TO MOLOCH

HOLY Moloch, blessed lord,  
Hatred to our souls impart.  
Put the heathen to the sword,  
Wound and pierce each contrite heart.  
Never more shall darkness fall  
But it seems a funeral pall ;  
Never shall the red sun rise  
But to red and swollen eyes.  
In the centuries that roll,  
Slowly grinding out our tears,  
Often thou hast taken toll ;  
Never till these latter years  
Have all nations lost the fray ;  
Lead not thou our feet astray.  
Never till the present time  
Have we offered all we hold,  
With one gesture, mad, sublime,  
Sons and lovers, lands and gold.  
Must we then still pray to thee,  
Moloch, for a victory ?

Eternal Moloch, strong to slay,  
Do not seek to heal or save.

Lord, it is the better way  
Swift to send them to the grave.  
Those of us too old to go  
Send our sons to face the foe,  
But, O lord ! we must remain  
Here, to pray and sort the slain.  
In every land the widows weep,  
In every land the children cry.  
Other gods are lulled to sleep,  
All the starving peoples die.  
What is left to offer you ?  
Thou, O Sacred King of Death !  
God of Blood and Lord of Guile,  
Do not let us waste our breath,  
Cast on us thy crimson smile.  
Moloch, lord, we pray to thee,  
Send at least one victory.

All the men in every land  
Pray to thee through battle's din,  
Swiftly now to show thy hand,  
Pray that soon one side may win.  
Under sea and in the sky,  
Everywhere our children die ;  
Laughter, happiness and light  
Perished in a single night.  
In every land the heaving tides  
Wash the sands a dreadful red,  
In every land the tired sun hides  
Under heaps and hills of dead.

In spite of all we've offered up  
Must we drink and drain the cup ?  
Everywhere the dark floods rise,  
Everywhere our hearts are torn.  
Every day a new Christ dies,  
Every day a devil's born.  
Moloch, lord, we pray to thee,  
Send at least one victory.

1917.

## ARMCHAIR

IF I were still of handsome middle-age  
 I should not govern yet, but still should hope  
 To help the prosecution of this war.  
 I'd talk and eat (though not eat wheaten bread),  
 I'd send my sons, if old enough, to France,  
 Or help to do my share in other ways.  
 All through the long spring evenings, when the sun  
 Pursues its primrose path towards the hills,  
 If fine, I'd plant potatoes on the lawn ;  
 If wet, write anxious letters to the Press.  
 I'd give up wine and spirits, and with pride  
 Refuse to eat meat more than once a day,  
 And seek to rob the workers of their beer.  
 The only way to win a hard-fought war  
 Is to annoy the people in small ways,  
 Bully or patronise them, as you will !  
 I'd teach poor mothers, who have seven sons  
 —All fighting men of clean and sober life—  
 How to look after babies and to cook ;  
 Teach them to save their money and invest ;  
 Not to bring children up in luxury  
 —But do without a nursemaid in the house !

If I were old, or only seventy,  
 Then should I be a great man in his prime.

I should rule army corps ; at my command  
Men would rise up, salute me, and attack  
—And die. Or I might also govern men  
By making speeches with my toothless jaws,  
Chattering constantly ; and men should say,  
“One grand old man is still worth half his  
pay !”

That day I’d send my grandsons out to France  
—And wish I’d got ten other ones to send  
(One cannot sacrifice too much, I’d say).

Then would I make a noble toothless speech,  
And all the listening Parliament would cheer.

“Gentlemen, we will never end this war  
Till all the younger men with martial mien  
Have entered capitals ; never make peace  
Till they are cripples, on one leg, or dead !”  
Then would the Bishops all go mad with joy,  
Cantuar, Ebor, and the other ones,  
Be overwhelmed with pious ecstasy.

In thanking Him we’d got a Christian—  
An Englishman—still worth his salt—to talk,  
In every pulpit they would preach and prance ;  
And our great Church would work, as heretofore,  
To bring this poor old nation to its knees.

Then we’d forbid all liberty, and make  
Free speech a relic of our impious past ;  
And when this war is finished, when the world  
Is torn and bleeding, cut and bruised to death,  
Then I’d pronounce my peace terms—to the poor !  
But as it is, I am not ninety yet,

And so must pay my reverence to these men—  
These grand old men, who still can see and talk,  
Who sacrifice each other's sons each day.  
O Lord ! let me be ninety yet, I pray.  
Methuselah was quite a youngster when  
He died. Now, vainly weeping, we should say :  
“ Another great man perished in his prime !”  
O let me govern, Lord, at ninety-nine !”

*August, 1917.*

## RAGTIME

THE lamps glow here and there, then echo down  
The vast deserted vistas of the town—  
Each light the echo'd note of some refrain  
Repeated in the city's fevered brain.  
Yet all is still, save when there wanders past  
—Finding the silence of the night too long—  
Some tattered wretch, who, from the night outcast,  
Sings, with an aching heart, a comic song.  
The vapid parrot-words flaunt through the night—  
Silly and gay, yet terrible. We know  
Men sang these words in many a deadly fight,  
And threw them—laughing—to a solemn foe ;  
Sang them where tattered houses stand up tall and stark,  
And bullets whistle through the ruined street,  
Where live men tread on dead men in the dark,  
And skulls are sown in fields once sown with wheat.  
Across the sea, where night is dark with blood  
And rockets flash, and guns roar hoarse and deep,  
They struggle through entanglements and mud,  
They suffer wounds—and die—

From far away the outcast's vacuous song  
Re-echoes like the singing of a throng ;  
His dragging footfalls echo down the street,  
And turn into a myriad marching feet.

*December, 1916.*

## PEACE CELEBRATION

Now we can say of those who died unsung,  
Unwept for, torn, "Thank God they were not blind  
Or mad! They've perished strong and young,  
Missing the misery we elders find  
In missing them." With such a platitude  
We try to cheer ourselves. And for each life  
Laid down for us, with duty well-imbued,  
With song-on-lip, in splendid soldier strife—  
For sailors, too, who willingly were sunk—  
We'll shout "Hooray!"—  
And get a little drunk.

*To SACHEVERELL*

## THE NEXT WAR

THE long war had ended.  
Its miseries had grown faded.  
Deaf men became difficult to talk to.  
Heroes became bores.

Those alchemists  
Who had converted blood into gold,  
Had grown elderly.  
But they held a meeting,  
Saying,  
“We think perhaps we ought  
To put up tombs  
Or erect altars  
To those brave lads  
Who were so willingly burnt,  
Or blinded,  
Or maimed,  
Who lost all likeness to a living thing,  
Or were blown to bleeding patches of flesh  
For our sakes.  
It would look well.  
Or we might even educate the children.”

But the richest of these wizards  
Coughed gently ;  
And he said,  
“I have always been to the front  
—In private enterprise—  
I yield in public spirit  
To no man.

I think yours is a very good idea  
—A capital idea—  
And not too costly.  
But it seems to me  
That the cause for which we fought  
Is again endangered.

What more fitting memorial for the fallen  
Than that their children  
Should fall for the same cause ?”  
Rushing eagerly into the street,  
The kindly old gentlemen cried  
To the young :

“Will you sacrifice  
Through your lethargy  
What your fathers died to gain ?  
Our cause is in peril.  
The world must be made safe for the young !”  
And the children  
Went. . . .

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